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AUTHOR Hamilton, Beatrice
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ABSTRACT

Anger is probably the most misunderstood and least expressed feeling. To understand anger, it is necessary to explore the process. Anger usually follows an experience of frustration, unmet expectations, loss of self-respect, and fear. The next stage seems to be anxiety, which may be interpreted as a disappointment, discomfort, or powerlessness. This anxiety is then immediately changed, usually without recognition, into feelings or actions of power and fight. Finally, relief is felt only after release of the negative energy in the body. The constructive way to deal with anger is to confront the situation. Guidelines for fighting fair include the following: (1) establishing the legitimacy of fighting; (2) dealing with one issue at a time; (3) choosing the arena carefully; (4) avoiding reaction to unintentional remarks; (5) avoiding resolutions that come too soon or too easily; (6) avoiding name calling; (7) avoiding cornering an opponent; (8) agreeing to disagree; (9) focusing on what is wanted rather than why it is wanted; and (10) maintaining a sense of humor. If fair or creative fighting is attempted, then three positive outcomes may result: an effective resolution may be found; everyone involved may maintain a clear sense of personal dignity throughout the conflict; or the relationship may be in no way damaged and may even be enhanced. (LLL)

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A MODEL FOR MANAGING ANGER AND CONFLICT

[Beatrice Hamilton]

Anger is a universal feeling. We all experience the feeling of being angry. Anger is also probably the most misunderstood and least expressed feeling. It was precisely for these reasons I chose to discuss effective ways of dealing with anger and conflict.

Anger is defined as an emotion that is characterized by strong feelings of displeasure, which are triggered by an incident that appear to be real or imagined wrong. It is about the feelings we call "irritation," "annoyance," or "getting mad." All these feelings are common in that a lot of us get the message that they are undesirable or negative. We are taught to avoid them and to avoid having them. Many people are so "in control" of these angry feelings that they lose the ability to identify them.

In understanding anger, it is necessary to explore the process of anger. Anger usually follows an experience of (a) frustration (goal or need blocked by an obstacle); (b) unmet expectations; (c) loss of self-respect (feeling hurt); and (d) fear. Therefore, anger appears to be a "secondary" feeling rather than a "primary" feeling. The next stage in the process of anger seems to be anxiety, which may be interpreted as a disappointment, discomfort or a feeling of being powerless. This anxiety is then immediately changed, usually without recognition, into feelings or actions of power and fight. At this time, an

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energy is released within the body. Finally, relief is felt only after expression or release of the negative energy in the body. If expression or release does occur, difficulty or problems may result such as, physical symptoms (ulcers, headaches, etc.), depression, apathy, and insomnia.

Together, then, anxiety and anger represent two emotional states that may produce a great deal of undesirable behavior in people. Moreover, understanding the process of anger and anxiety can eliminate many of these behaviors.

In learning to deal with anger effectively, I recommend that people explore reasons why they feel angry. First, give youself time to cool off. Secondly, gather sufficient information about the reasons you feel angry. Thirdly, identify the source with which the present anger may be related. Fourth, develop an alternative course of action and proceed with it. For example, a woman married to a "nice guy" becomes very angry every time he drinks a beer. In exploring this further, the woman was experiencing anger from her previous marriage to an alcoholic. In this situation, it is not necessary for the woman to express her anger toward her current husband every time he drinks a beer. However, she may need to deal with her husband drinking a beer if it causes her discomfort. She would need to deal with her resentments toward her ex-husband, possibly through counseling.

The constructive way to deal with anger is to confront the

situation and person(s) involved in the conflict. I have identified ten guidelines in preparing people to fight fair. It is important to remember that to be able to fight fair all the time is extremely difficult. These guidelines are the ideal things to strive for, but do not expect perfection! The ten guidelines are described below:

1. Establish the legitimacy of fighting. Fighting must be seen as a natural, healthy and sometimes an appropriate thing to do. Above all, fighting must not be seen as an activity to be avoided at all costs.
2. Deal with one issue at a time. When unfinished business or old resentments are brought into the conflict, it takes the focus off the main issue and creates a defensive atmosphere. When this situation arises, the current issue should be set aside until there is closure or the unfinished issue is achieved.
3. Choose the arena carefully. Participants must understand and agree that if one person does not want to fight at a particular moment, then no fight takes place at that time. It is very acceptable to "postpone" a fight or conflict.
4. Avoid reacting to unintentional remarks. An important aspect of creative fighting is to establish the norm that when unexpected or unintentional comments are made during the heat of the battle, none of the participants involved

will respond by escalating the fight into a more volatile stage that no one wants. The best thing to do would be to stop the conversation and determine whether the comment accurately conveys what the speaker meant.

5. Avoid resolutions that come too soon or too easily. Resolutions that come too soon can result in several negative side effects. For example, if a fight ends prematurely, the "unfinished business" does not go away. Resentments will almost certainly manifest itself again. Remember, each "fight" is different and has its own unique level of intensity. Conflicts that involve intense feelings, deep-seated values or complex issues may need participants involved to agree to devote as much time as required to achieve a resolution. In these conflicts, if time is limited, it may be necessary for the parties to postpone the conflict resolution and to resume at an agreed upon time.
6. Avoid name calling. In creative if "fair" fighting each participant strives to achieve a specific goal, rather than in devoting their efforts attempting to injure their opponents as much as possible. Name calling usually occurs when logical arguments fail or when one or more of the participants have become frustrated beyond tolerance. The best way to avoid name calling is for each person to speak

only in terms of what he or she feels, wants or thinks.

7. Avoid cornering an opponent. Persons in conflict must be allowed to save face. If it becomes obvious that an opponent cannot win a particular argument, it is best to let that opponent retire gracefully. If not, this type of behavior may come back to haunt you.

8. Agree to disagree. Although a mutually acceptable resolution is always the desired outcome, sometimes the reality is such that a resolution is not available. This happens frequently when people have different belief values and there is little or no chance that anything can be said to alter the situation. The participants should agree to disagree and drop the subject. At some point, the participants need to come to some acceptance of each other's opposing views.

9. Focus on <u>what</u> is wanted rather than <u>why</u> it is wanted. Spending time and energy exploring <u>why</u> each party wants what he or she wants, is at best, a total waste of time. It is like an alcoholic who spends their entire course of treatment trying to figure out "why" they are an alcoholic rather than focusing on learning how to recover from their illness.

10. Maintain a sense of humor. Dealing with conflict is serious and certainly deserves to be respected, but it is important for participants not to lose their perspectives. The best way to retain one's perspective during a fight is to exercise a sense of humor. It is perfectly legitimate to recognize the humor in certain situations during a conflict and to respond accordingly.

In summary, everyone experiences anger and it is healthy and normal. The expression of anger is necessary to feel "relief," but some relief can also be gained through physical activity, such as jogging, swimming, hiking, and other physical exercises. This works best when direct expression of anger would be inappropriate or when the angry person is in a rage. But when there is a direct expression of anger, a conflict usually arises. The most positive and constructive way to deal with conflict is to strive for "fair fighting." If fair or creative fighting is attempted, then three positive outcomes may result: (1) An effective resolution is found, (2) everyone involved maintains a clear sense of personal dignity throughout the conflict and, (3) the relationship is in no way damaged, and may even be enhanced.